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Life's a game for pioneer Jane

From Hull to Hollywood, but it's no flight of fancy

Jane has been at the leading edge of gaming since learning to code at the age of 12. Jane's story is the stuff of movies, and it seems appropriate that such an amazing career included a stint in the Hollywood hills...

"I remember the evening there was a knock on the door of our council house in Hull. On the doorstep was Sam Tramiel, son of Jack, the founder of Commodore and owner of Atari. His job? Persuade my parents that my moving to San Francisco was a good idea."

Sam must have been persuasive enough because, shortly after, Jane Rachel Whittaker was flying to the west coast to join the gaming industry A-list in Silicon Valley.

Jane didn't have an easy start in life. Born a type of Siamese twin meant undergoing more than 40 operations and spending a huge amount of time in hospital. Time that was put to good use learning the art of video game programming from a hospital bed!

In early teens Jane churned out games for the Sinclair ZX81 and Sinclair Spectrum, selling them by mail order. At 16, Jane left school one Friday and started work the following Monday as a full-time game developer.

The creative studio was a lock-up garage in Essex, until that evening gaming royalty knocked on the door.

Jane's introduction to Atari came at a time when two of the biggest grossing movies were Alien and Predator. Jane's task was to create computer games for both films. The idea was different. Why not bring the two together? And so Alien vs. Predator - the biggest selling console game of the 1990s, was born.

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During the development process Jane, who became Atari's youngest-ever Vice President, rubbed shoulders with the likes of Ridley Scott and John Hurt. It was that taste of Hollywood which led Jane to accept an offer to join MGM United Artists as Director of Development, overseeing games for the James Bond franchise and MGM properties such as Stargate.

A move to Electronic Arts saw Jane working with the company's design studios around the world, before moving back to the UK. Once on home soil, Jane left the corporate world to freelance and follow a passion for flight simulation titles. Jane is married to a quadruple amputee and wanted to focus on daily care, yet the allure of the industry continued to beckon.

Since then Jane has also developed another career as journalist, as deputy editor of PC Pilot magazine and an expert aviation and military advisor for the likes of the BBC and Sky News. Jane has developed exclusive add-on mission packs for the Microsoft Flight Simulator platform, with the accolade of a special version of the venerable simulator based around Jane's work. Jane has used the revenue to support charitable causes.

So what's the link to Flight Angels 2016? Jane and the wider flight simulation community have donated money to support eight-year-old Rosie Davies. Rosie was born without a lower spinal cord and lower body. Both her legs had to be amputated and she has an artificial stomach.

"Every copy of the Arctic Rescue, Cargo Crew and Dangerous Approaches packs that I've produced and sold have gone on to help Rosie," Jane added.

Rosie and her family have also been supported by Over the Wall - one of the beneficiaries of the simulation weekend - and through that Jane met the charity's CEO Kevin Mathieson.

The pair got chatting and the idea of Flight Angels was born. They've also collaborated on a new gaming company - Keystone - which will develop its own titles and support young developers to get a foothold in the games market. Keystone will plough 70% of all the money it makes back into the work done by Over the Wall.

Jane said: "I can't wait to get into the pilot's seat and kick-off the weekend. Pilots get into the air because it allows them the ultimate freedom, to break the shackles of daily life, to literally ascend to the stars.

"In the cockpit, your troubles become as small as the houses below. Flight Angels 2016 does the same for deserving children. Every penny we raise helps the children break free from their issues, empowering each and every one of them to reach for the heavens with their goals and aspirations.

"They are carried on the wings of the pilots, aviation enthusiasts and everyone who donates during the event. The true Flight Angels!"

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Flight Angels 2016 will be broadcast live around the world from September 16-18. A live stream will show 30 hours of flights, interviews, chats and special events.

The charity 'telethon' is the brainchild of flight sim software developer Jane Rachel Whittaker and online aviation guru Pete Wright, aka [Frooglesim](#).

Flight Angels will be raising funds for three charities in the UK and USA: [Over the Wall](#), the [SeriousFun Children's Network](#) and [Vision of Flight](#). Over the Wall and SeriousFun offer help and support to families of children with life-limiting illnesses. Vision of Flight is dedicated to encouraging young people, often from underprivileged backgrounds, into a career in aviation.

Here's how donations will help Over the Wall:

- £20 will pay for a seriously ill child to try a new sport like kayaking, archery or climbing. For the vast majority of our campers, these will be brand new experiences that they would never have dreamt they could do.
- £50 will provide a Discovery Box, T-shirt and brilliance beads for one of our campers. Discovery Boxes are full of tangible reminders of camp and all that each child have achieved. The children cherish and continue to draw strength from them way after camp has ended.
- £100 will pay for enough medication syringes to support a single camp (supporting up to 65 children). Medical care is provided by our wonderful team of volunteer doctors and nurses who run our onsite medical facility or 'beach hut' as its is known.
- £500 will pay for transportation to and from one of our camps, which we provide to all campers, so that cost of travel is never a barrier to attending. Campers are chaperoned en route by experienced medical volunteers.
- £1,000 will pay for the whole cost of accommodating a child at one of our Siblings Camps, where siblings of children with serious illnesses are given the chance to, in their words "have fun without feeling guilty".
- £1,500 will pay for a place at one of our genuinely life changing Health Challenge Camps, for children aged 8-17 with serious and life changing illnesses.

Details of how to take part in Flight Angels 2016 are available at www.flight-angels.com - where you can also learn more about the charities, make a donation or book a seat on Concorde.

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